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SENIOR TRANSPORTATION

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Testimony prepared for:

***Keeping America's Seniors Moving:
Examining Ways to Improve Senior Transportation***

A forum convened by the
The Special Committee on Aging
U.S. Senate

Good afternoon. I am Stephan Kline, Legislative Director for the United Jewish Communities. I am so pleased that Chairman Craig and Ranking Member Breaux agreed to sponsor "Keeping America's Seniors Moving: Examining Ways to Improve Senior Transportation." I would like my full written remarks included in the public record. Senior transportation is a problem for everyone in America. In order for our society to remain strong, we must protect and respect our elderly and this includes providing transportation to access needed services.

The United Jewish Communities is a faith-based charity that represents 156 local Jewish Federations and 400 independent Jewish communities across North America. As one of the country's largest social service networks, our Federations help to plan, coordinate, and fund programs for people in need. Collectively, we provide services to more than one million clients each year in the Jewish and general communities. Our motivation for our work is to engage our institutions and the Jewish people and translate the Jewish values of *tzedakah*, which means "justice," and *tikkun olam* or "repair of the world" into action.

Based upon common religious precepts and time-honored traditions to support our parents in old age as well as a demographic imperative, care for the elderly is at the very top of our Federations' domestic policy agenda. The Jewish community has a much higher percentage of elderly persons than the general population, 20 percent over the age of 65 compared to about 12 percent. Our 85+ population is actually the fastest growing part of our community. These trends will continue with the aging of the Jewish Baby Boomers who will begin to reach retirement age in 2010. Our community, however, is only at the front of a national trend in aging: the entire U.S. senior population is projected to more than double to nearly 80 million individuals over the next 30 years.

Because of the aging of the Jewish community, we have worked to develop solutions to enable older Americans to remain at home and in their communities for as long as safely possible, as this promotes physical and mental wellbeing. Many of our local agencies have shared with us stories demonstrating a common barrier regarding senior services. Excellent programs that care for the elderly may be in place and are amply funded by our community, but seniors do not have the capacity to attend the programs or receive services due to a lack of transportation. Obviously, without access or transport, the impact of individual programs is diminished. With financial support provided by the Mt. Sinai Health Care Foundation of Cleveland, Ohio, UJC responded by initiating a Senior Transportation Project in 2002.

Nationally, there is a tremendous increase in the need for transportation services for the senior population. While older adults largely utilize private cars for transportation, at some point most will lose the physical and/or financial capacity to drive or maintain a car. The old-old population (those over the age of 85) may no longer be able to depend on private automobiles but still want to get out and about. Finding necessary transportation is difficult for most elderly, but particularly for those living in suburban or rural communities where destinations are too far to walk, public transit is non-existent or poor, and private transportation, if available, is limited or prohibitively expensive.

Most older adults are reluctant to rely on friends and family even for the most essential transportation needs - access to health and social services. The result is often increasing isolation and deterioration in health and quality of life. Transportation is not only a critical part of the service delivery system but it also becomes essential in order for older adults to maintain their independence.

There is insufficient funding from federal or state resources for vans and busses to counter the need. Nonprofits that run transportation programs usually limit their applicability to doctor visits or other health-related appointments. Moreover, public resources cannot be dedicated to operational costs like driver salaries, gas, insurance or maintenance. Nonprofits must come up with additional outside funding to provide for these expenses -- which easily can top \$100,000 or more per bus or van per year. Even by limiting the trips to health-related destinations, the vans are over utilized and nonprofits are forced to turn away clients and severely limit the geographical area served.

Let me talk to you about the problems facing one of the agencies in our network. United Jewish Federation of Metrowest, New Jersey serves elderly community members in Essex, Morris, Sussex and northern Union counties. This is greater suburbia, where most members of the Jewish community now live. It can be particularly difficult to manage one's affairs in suburbia without personal transportation.

In Metrowest, the Federation has been testing a variety of service delivery models and sought to implement a large demonstration project in cooperation with area foundations. The Federation had found that suburban mass transit systems lack the routes, frequency, and assistive service required to meet the needs of their clients to access a variety of therapeutic, social and recreational programs provided by their senior centers or required for community members. Ultimately, the greatest unmet need was in providing on-demand, door-to-door, escorted transportation between home and appointments. The Federation had hoped to meet the transportation needs for a variety of destinations including appointments to physicians, dentists, and other medical services such as testing centers and treatments for chemotherapy and dialysis, counseling and mental health services, adult day care, community, recreational, and social events, and employment.

Metrowest estimates that effectively serving their elderly clients' transportation needs would cost between \$250,000 and \$500,000 annually and while nonprofit organizations have made extensive efforts to provide transportation services, the cost of service is ultimately prohibitive. A comprehensive transportation program for seniors cannot be implemented in this community without substantial involvement from the public sector.

According to information gathered by the Community Transit Association of America, the expected demand in fiscal year 2004 for equipment and services from the Federal Transit Administration's Section 5310 Program for the Elderly and People with Disabilities is \$400 million: \$50 million for replacement vehicles, \$150 million for new vehicles to be used for expanded capacity and new service, \$65 million for purchase-of-service contracts, and at least \$135 million for operating expenses. Total national

estimates of unmet or uncompensated transportation needs for seniors exceed \$1 billion per year, a projection that includes funds devoted to transportation planning and demonstration projects, various door-to-door transit expansions and voucher programs, and transportation provided by family caregivers.

While innovative methods to care and support well and frail-elderly men and women are emerging, no coordinated senior transportation policy has existed at the national level. This void in national policy has had some very real consequences:

- ◆ There are far too few resources provided by the federal government to support senior transportation and suitable alternatives to private automobiles for our aging population really do not exist;
- ◆ There is no federal funding stream that can be used to establish demonstration projects at the local level and no agency or resource at the national level that a provider or consumer of transportation services can use to research best practices; and
- ◆ There is only limited coordination among the public agencies that provide transportation services for seniors.

It is because of the need to fill these gaps that UJC initiated and now coordinates the Senior Transportation Work Group, which we formed 12 months ago. We recognized that the reauthorization of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, which expires later this year, presents a unique opportunity to influence the development of senior policies on transportation. Yet, there was no national voice that was dedicated to raising the profile of the senior transportation issue.

Among the more than 40 groups that are now working with us to promote senior transportation are organizations that focus on aging like the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging and the Association of Programs on Rural Independent Living; our faith partners Lutheran Services in America and Volunteers of America; agencies that focus on persons with disabilities such as Easter Seals and Paralyzed Veterans of America; national groups that promote community transportation needs including the Community Transportation Association of America and the Surface Transportation Policy Project; and the voices of labor like the Amalgamated Transit Union and the Transport Workers Union.

Working with the Senior Transportation Work Group, we have compiled a dozen recommendations that will transform the national infrastructure of senior transportation through increased funding and innovative policies. These proposals follow this testimony. The main recommendations are summarized in the following four points:

- ◆ Congress should significantly increase funding for the Federal Transit Administration's Section 5310 program, the major transit program for seniors and persons with disabilities. Funding for this program is currently set at \$91

million and we recommend an expansion to \$350 million which would partially offset the estimated \$1 billion per year in unmet transportation needs that exist for seniors in this country.

- ◆ Congress should set aside specific demonstration project funding within the Federal Transit Administration to help establish best practices at the local level and planning mechanisms for innovative and collaborative transportation projects for senior citizens. Congress should also establish a national technical assistance center to share models and best practices related to senior transportation.
- ◆ Congress should allow states to have more flexibility in their use of Section 5310 funds, allowing those funds to be utilized for operating expenses as well as capital expenditures and should permit matching funds to be derived from any source, including other federal programs. These changes would make the Section 5310 program consistent with other federal transportation programs and would allow nonprofits to not only obtain new vans and busses but also to use public revenue to pay for preventative maintenance, insurance, gasoline, and driver salaries.
- ◆ Finally, Congress should address the needs of seniors in transportation planning and decision-making. As part of coordinated regional planning, states and metropolitan planning organizations must evaluate the impact of transportation systems on seniors, and seniors must have a reasonable opportunity to comment during the development of transportation improvement programs.

I want to thank the members of the Senate Special Committee on Aging for the opportunity to share with you today the Senior Transportation Task Force's commitment to senior transportation, and I will be very pleased to answer any questions you may have at the appropriate time.

SENIOR TRANSPORTATION WORK GROUP

July 21, 2003

The Honorable Larry E. Craig
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Craig:

Thank you for convening today's forum on senior transportation before the Senate Special Committee on Aging. As depicted in the presentations, there is a tremendous increase in the need for transportation services, particularly among the older population. While older adults largely utilize private cars for transportation, as they age the majority will lose the physical and/or financial capacity to drive or maintain a car. Persons 85 and over are the fastest growing segment of the American population with this age group increasing at a rate four times faster than the overall population. Most of the individuals rely on family, friends or public and private transportation to access services and participate in social and recreational events in their communities.

Finding necessary transportation is difficult for most elderly, and particularly for those who live in either suburban or rural communities where destinations are too far to walk, public transit is non-existent or poor, and private transportation, if available, is limited and often prohibitively expensive. Many older adults are reluctant to rely on friends and family even for their most essential transportation needs - access to health and social services – and the result is often increasing isolation and deterioration in health and quality of life. As a result, transportation is not only a critical part of the service delivery system but is also essential to older adults maintaining their independence.

The reauthorization of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) is an excellent opportunity for Congress to improve the availability and accessibility of transportation services for our senior citizens who most depend on them. This can be accomplished by adequately funding federal transportation projects as well as improving programs that already exist. The signatories listed below all have an interest in providing sufficient resources and creative ideas to expand community-based transportation resources for older adults. We have joined together to recommend the attached proposals for inclusion in the reauthorization of TEA-21. The proposals include increased funding and linkages to disabilities, innovative solutions to senior transportation issues, and modifications to the Section 5310 Elderly and Persons with Disabilities Program at the Federal Transit Administration.

It is our hope that you will adopt the 12 proposals that follow. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Laurie Mintzer Edberg at United Jewish Communities at (202) 736-5866. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families
Amalgamated Transit Union
American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging
American Association for International Aging
American Association of People with Disabilities
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Retiree Program
Association of Jewish Aging Services
Association of Jewish Family & Children's Agencies
Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living Rural Transportation Initiative
The Beverly Foundation
B'nai B'rith International Center for Senior Services
Center for Community Change
Community Transportation Association of America
Easter Seals
International Association of Jewish Vocational Services
International Union, United Auto Workers
Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland
Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago
Lutheran Services in America
National Assembly of Health & Human Service Organizations
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging
National Association of State Long Term Care Ombudsman Programs
National Caucus and Center on Black Aged Inc.
National Hispanic Council on Aging
National Organization for Empowering Caregivers
National Senior Citizens Law Center
OWL, the voice of midlife and older women
Paralyzed Veterans of America
Seniors' Resource Center
Special Transit, Colorado
Surface Transportation Policy Project
The Mt Sinai Health Care Foundation
The Retired Officers Association
Transport Workers Union
UJA-Federation of New York
Urban and Environmental Policy Institute
United Jewish Communities
Volunteers of America

SENIOR TRANSPORTATION WORK GROUP

Recommendations for Reauthorization of TEA-21

The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), the major funding authorization bill for federal transportation projects expires on September 30, 2003 and will be reauthorized this year. United Jewish Communities (UJC) has formed the Senior Transportation Task Force, a national work group of organizations focused on aging, disability, healthcare, faith-based, transit, labor and other issues with a common interest in promoting senior transportation policies in Congress. The Senior Transportation Task Force supports the following 12 proposals within the reauthorization process:

1. Increase funding for the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the agency within the Department of Transportation (DOT) that funds most transit programs serving senior citizens, and, in particular, increase the authorization and appropriations levels for the FTA Section 5310 Program for the Elderly and People with Disabilities to \$350 million per year. This would partially offset the estimated \$1 billion/year in unmet transportation needs that exists for seniors in this country;
2. Provide funding and authorization for innovations including the proposed New Freedom Initiative which would give states more flexibility and discretion for programs related to persons with disabilities. Funding dedicated for these purposes should not diminish existing funding for other transportation programs. Such programs would assist many people over the age of 65 who have problems with at least one activity of daily living, such as bathing, dressing and personal hygiene. The proposal would add and target funding for federal transit in a formula grant program to state and local governments and a competitive grant program with eligibility open to not-for-profit and for-profit organizations;
3. Change the matching requirements of Section 5310 to be comparable to funding for the Section 5311 Rural Public Transportation Program, which allows non-FTA matching funds to come from any source, including other federal programs;
4. Change the permissible use of funds requirement of Section 5310 to allow funds to be used in the same manner as the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA's) Section 5311 Rural Transportation Program and encourage states to use their Section 5310 allocations to directly assist with operating costs in addition to providing for capital expenditures;
5. States should submit to the FTA information relating to the utilization of the Section 5310 program by providers and the consumers they serve, including the names of organizations receiving funding, the equipment or services made available through the program, the number of clients served, and any available information relating to unmet transit needs of the senior population and persons with disabilities. The critical transit employee labor protections provided by Section 5333(b) of the Federal Transit Act should fully apply to this program as well as any new federal transit programs created through TEA 21's reauthorization;
6. Set aside specific demonstration project funding within the FTA to help establish best practices at the local level and planning mechanisms for innovative and collaborative transportation projects for senior citizens, with eligibility open to all public or private community-based agencies serving this population. Also, set aside funding within the FTA to establish a national technical assistance center to disseminate models and best practices related to transportation of senior citizens;

7. Create a Transit Service Corps for seniors to encourage the use of volunteers to transport elderly persons. Eligibility for grant funding within the FTA would be available for all public or private community-based agencies serving the elderly, for the following purposes: 1) to pay volunteer drivers of private cars or vans (but not buses) who transport elderly persons a modest stipend for each mile driven; and 2) to cover the incremental cost increases associated with adding volunteer drivers to the liability insurance policies of the agency;
8. Increase funding for Mobility Managers, similar to service coordinators for housing and supportive services, who help determine the transportation needs of seniors and connect them with the best available transportation options;
9. Permit Medicare funding to be used for non-emergency, but medically necessary, transportation. Currently, Medicare is supposed to only pay for transportation in the case of a health emergency and will only reimburse for transport by ambulance. To get seniors to medically necessary, but non-emergency, health appointments, physicians have asserted that these types of trips are necessitated by an emergency; Medicare then will reimburse for the use of the ambulance. The federal government would save money if they allowed Medicare to pay for transportation in these cases but required the use of the least expensive but medically appropriate type of transit, including vans, cars or taxis;
10. Provide effective means to address the needs of seniors and persons with disabilities in transportation planning and decision-making. As part of coordinated regional and state-wide transportation planning, states and metropolitan planning organizations must evaluate the impact of transportation systems on seniors and people with disabilities, and these special populations must have a reasonable opportunity to comment during the development of transportation improvement programs. States should be required to appoint seniors and people with disabilities and others with a direct stake in the provision of public transportation services as full participants in state transportation planning commissions and MPO boards, with the right to vote;
11. Encourage States to coordinate to the extent feasible the transportation elements within senior programs including the Older Americans Act, Medicaid, and the Section 202 housing program with other comparable highway and public transit planning processes carried out by states and MPOs;
12. Require States to include strategies to reduce both vehicular and pedestrian injuries and deaths to seniors and persons with disabilities as part of their highway safety programs. To aid the states in meeting this requirement, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration would issue guidelines for identifying and understanding such strategies and would be authorized to draw on their federal highway safety grant funds to implement appropriate safety measures and designs.